

ICMA EUROPEAN REPO COUNCIL

DG Internal Market and Services
Directorate H – Financial Institutions
Unit H1 – Banking and Financial conglomerates
European Commission
SPA2, 1049 Brussels

3 March 2011

Dear Sirs,

Response submission from the ICMA European Repo Council

Re: Technical details of a possible EU framework for bank recovery and resolution

Introduction:

On behalf of the European Repo Council (“ERC”) of the International Capital Market Association (“ICMA”), the purpose of this letter is to provide feedback primarily concerning the repo oriented aspects of the DG Internal Market and Services working document on the technical details of a possible EU framework for bank recovery and resolution, published on 6 January.

The ERC was established by ICMA in December 1999, to represent the repo community in Europe. It is composed of practitioners in the repo field, who meet regularly to discuss market developments in order to ensure that practical day-to-day issues are fully understood and dealt with adequately.

The repo market is one of the largest and most active sectors in today’s money markets. It provides an efficient source of money market funding for financial intermediaries while providing a secure home for liquid investments. Repo is also used by central banks as their principal tool in open market operations to control short-term interest rates. Repos are attractive as a monetary policy instrument because they carry a low credit risk while serving as a flexible instrument for liquidity management, which benefits the functioning of financial markets. Central banks are also able to act swiftly as lenders of last resort during periods of market turbulence by way of the repo market.¹

In a repo transaction securities are exchanged for cash with an Agreement to repurchase the securities at a future date. The transaction is collateralised, with the cash securing the seller’s

¹ The ERC has published a White Paper on the operation of the European repo market, the role of short-selling, the problem of settlement failures and the need for reform of the market infrastructure. This paper sets out in greater detail what the repo market is and its benefits and is available via the ICMA [website](#).

securities and the securities securing the buyer's cash. Collateral and netting are key to the proper functioning of repo markets. In the event of default, the collateral can be sold and exposure to the defaulting party can be netted off.

In the international market, the ICMA Global Master Repurchase Agreement (GMRA or Agreement)² provides a robust legal framework for documenting repo transactions. Supervisory authorities recognise the effect of the GMRA netting provisions for regulatory capital and large exposure requirements provided, inter alia, that a reasoned legal opinion has been obtained to the effect that, in the event of a legal challenge, the relevant courts and administrative authorities would find that, where a counterparty fails owing to default, bankruptcy, liquidation or any other similar circumstance, the regulated firm's claims and obligations pursuant to the GMRA would be limited to a net sum under the law of the relevant jurisdiction(s), and which meets certain other requirements. Accordingly, ICMA obtains and annually updates legal opinions on the GMRA from 62 jurisdictions worldwide. These opinions cover both the enforceability of the netting provisions of the GMRA as well as the validity of the GMRA as a whole.

The ERC notes that on 20 October, 2010, the Commission announced its plans for an EU framework for crisis management in the financial sector. Further to this, DG Internal Market and Services are now consulting on the technical details of such a framework. The ERC further notes that the objective of this consultation is to inform the preparation of a formal Commission legislative proposal scheduled for adoption in June 2011.

Commentary:

Whilst there are many interesting issues discussed in this consultation paper, the ERC is for now going to primarily restrict its focus to those aspects that bear most directly on repo. As the ERC sees it, the particularly pertinent matters are those relating to the temporary suspension of rights.

A. Temporary suspension of rights:

Section G12 of this consultation proposes a suspension of "... payment or delivery obligations pursuant to any contract". The ERC notes that it is important to clarify that such a suspension would have to operate on a reciprocal basis in order to be equitable.

At G13 this consultation proposes a "...temporary suspension of all close out rights of any party under a netting arrangement with a failing credit institution that arise solely by reason of an action or anticipated action by the resolution authority...". Whilst the ERC understands that the purpose of such suspension would be to give resolution authorities the benefit of a short time to decide which assets and liabilities should be transferred and to effect the transfers, it considers that the following observations merit detailed and careful consideration as this proposal is progressed:

- Close out netting is an important legal mechanism through which exposures (and therefore risks) may be reduced between counterparties. The importance of such a risk mitigation tool in supporting the stability and efficiency of the financial system has been consistently recognised and supported by policy makers. Any suspension of close out netting rights alters the measure of risk to which a party is exposed. In a repo context, this would result in a requirement for increased collateral to account for market movement during/post the period of suspension and thus has clear consequences on the cost and therefore the attractiveness of this essential form of short financing. In considering the implication of this, it is important to note that this extra

² The GMRA is the most extensively used cross border repo master Agreement and has reduced the risks associated with previously poorly documented repo transactions.

collateral cost will be borne throughout the life of all repo transactions subject to the possible application of suspension constraints, notwithstanding that the incidence of any actual exercise of the suspension power may prove to be an extremely rare occurrence.

- Furthermore, if there was any disruption to the efficacy or enforceability of netting such that institutions would be unable to reduce their regulatory capital requirement under the Basel capital regime by relying on close out netting under a master agreement such as the GMRA, the burden of finding additional collateral would be exacerbated by a need to raise additional capital. The ERC is keen to ensure that the legal certainty of such netting arrangements is protected and that there are no unintended consequences in this regard. In case it arises, this would again be an ongoing cost, regardless of the contingent nature of the legal uncertainty occasioned by the creation of a suspension power.
- For the reasons set out above, the ERC regards the imposition of a temporary suspension of close out netting as undesirable. Once a termination event occurs, a party should be able to manage its credit and market risk in relation to its positions with the relevant failing counterparty, based on its assessment of market conditions and the situation of the counterparty. It must be able to take action to mitigate market risk by closing out such positions, without delay. The risk of market movement is very real, as the suspension would act in relation to just those contracts concerned, whilst the market as a whole would remain open – and be cognisant of the imposition of the suspension.
- If there is, nevertheless, to be any form of suspension of rights it is essential that this should be both clearly defined and as limited as possible in terms of time frame. Any such suspension should not be capable of extension by the resolution authorities or otherwise. The consultation suggests that any suspension should last no longer than forty-eight hours after the time the suspension is notified; or 5pm on the business day following the day of notification (whichever period is longer). The ERC is pleased to note that the consultation recognises the importance of identifying a clear point from which the suspension would take effect. It is important for the market to understand what is meant by ‘the time the suspension is notified’. In addition, the methods of notification set out in G10 of this consultation must be accessible and clear.
- Central to the GMRA’s netting provisions are the Events of Default which trigger the termination and closing out of the Agreement. The consultation proposes a suspension of all close out rights that “arise *solely* by reason of an action or anticipated action by the resolution authority”. The ERC is keen to ensure that this does not impede close out rights arising by reason of other termination triggers. Any disruption to such rights would further undermine the legal certainty and risk mitigation capabilities of the Agreement. It is therefore important to clarify what form of resolution action is included within this condition. If the purpose of the suspension is indeed to provide the resolution authorities with the time to select and transfer assets and liabilities then the suspension should be limited to a suspension of close out rights arising by virtue of the use of the transfer powers of the resolution authority.
- This consultation asks whether any classes of counterparty should be excluded from the scope of the suspension of close out netting. Examples given include CCPs and payment and securities settlement systems that fall within the scope of the Settlement Finality Directive. The ERC is concerned that the exclusion of some counterparty types from the suspension would create competitive distortions; present arbitrage opportunities; and result in a misalignment with the rest of the market, which would undermine its stable functioning.

- During the period of suspension, the resolution authorities may transfer covered rights and liabilities to a private sector purchaser or another entity; or decide that such rights and liabilities will remain with the residual, 'failed' bank. If the former is the case, the ERC is concerned that there are robust and transparent criteria which such transferee must meet, at the very least in terms of its solvency. The ERC is also keen to ensure that any hardening periods (in which transactions are vulnerable to being challenged) with respect to relevant insolvency procedures are not 'reset' as a consequence of any transfer.
- This consultation notes that "If the rights and liabilities covered by a netting arrangement remain with the relevant credit institution, a person may exercise all rights under that agreement". This applies on the expiry of the suspension or prior to such expiry if the resolution authority so notifies the counterparty. It is not clear whether close out netting may be enforced at this point by reason of the resolution action, or not. Further detail is again also required in respect of the method of notification.

B. Partial transfers: safeguards for counterparties

The ERC is pleased to note the safeguards proposed within this consultation paper which aim to prevent resolution authorities from 'cherry picking' rights and liabilities under protected market arrangements, including title transfer financial collateral arrangements, set off arrangements, netting arrangements and structured finance arrangements.

Concluding remarks:

The ERC notes that the arrangements under consideration in the consultation proposals need to be carefully developed to take account of repo (and other types of financing) trades, in addition to underlying cash securities trades. The ERC considers that whilst it is right to seek the orderly resolution of a failing institution, this must be balanced with the market need for prompt close out so as to mitigate the risk of adverse market movement during the period of suspension. The imposition of rigid or ill defined constraints could serve to impede established market practise for the efficient (repo) financing of securities positions.

The ERC appreciate the valuable contribution made by the European Commission's examination of the issues articulated in this consultation paper and would like to thank the European Commission for its careful consideration of the repo oriented points made in this response. The ERC remains at your disposal to discuss any of the above points.

Yours faithfully,



Godfried De Vidts

Chairman

ICMA European Repo Council